



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

22 October 2021

An archdiocesan conversation about the vitality and future of our parishes

In the movie *Amadeus*, when Mozart asked Emperor Joseph II what he thought about his newest opera, he said: There are simply too many parishes and churches, I mean, notes.

We're praying and working hard to promote vocations to the priesthood, but even when we have more priests, we would still have too many parishes and churches.

The general population has declined, as has the Catholic population, and the number of priests, but the number of parishes and churches hasn't declined correspondingly.

Buildings serve what defines a parish: serving the poor; learning and teaching the Gospel; prayer and worship. We don't maintain chapels of convenience, or museums to the past.

If all three activities aren't present, call it what you will, but it's not a parish, and the parishioners have decided it should be closed (not the old, fat, and bald archbishop).

One priest said: We don't have too few priests, we have too many parishes. Too many for our priests to pastor, and too many of them less than active and vibrant.

A parish just can't attract, retain, or offer spiritual nourishment to people if nothing happens there in between Sundays, and if parishioners don't share time, talent and treasure.

And so, there's a need to do pastoral planning, that is, how best to provide pastoral care to Catholics in the 30 counties of the Archdiocese; this effort will be led by Jeff Henderson.

The first step: Jeff will develop an instrument to be used to solicit responses from on-line surveys and at in-person meetings in February 2022. All are welcome to give input.

The second step: Jeff will draw from the survey responses to determine what questions to ask, criteria to use, and standards for measuring the vitality of a parish, and its future.

The third step: Jeff will use those standards to recommend which parishes and churches to close, merge, or leave as is, and in such a way that all will take ownership of the decision.

Pastoral planning doesn't signal we've given up hope; *au contraire*, it serves to invigorate our efforts to continue the mission of Jesus in the ministries of our parishes and churches.

Michael O. Jackels

Archbishop of Dubuque